

Shutesbury-Leverett Broadband Committee
Wendell Broadband Committee
c/o Shutesbury Town Hall
Shutesbury, MA 01072

August 16, 2006

Ms. Andrea Nixon, Clerk
Cable Television Division
One South Station
Boston, Massachusetts 02110

Re: CTV 06-1 – Petition of Verizon New England, Inc.

Dear Ms. Nixon:

I am writing on behalf of the towns of Shutesbury, Leverett, and Wendell to express our vehement objection to Verizon's petition to shorten the time period of the required franchise negotiation process.

As you know, Verizon has been pushing in many states, and at the federal level, for "regulatory relief," claiming that their ability to deploy next generation technology (i.e., fiber-to-the-premises, or "FIOS"), depends on it. In fact, Verizon has a long history of making regulatory demands in exchange for promises of services deployments and infrastructure upgrades that never materialize. That's how Verizon became the complacent and unresponsive monopoly it is today.

Verizon has cherry-picked a few wealthy towns for its "next-generation" services and gotten disproportionate amounts of positive press for it. But while Verizon's new technology deployments are being heralded, thirty towns in the Pioneer Valley alone still have no prospect of receiving the "last-generation" technology from Verizon, and are thus relegated to 56K dial-up modems (remember those?) and very unreliable and poor quality voice service.

Logically, one would expect towns that already have a cable TV provider and at least one broadband Internet option to oppose this petition in order to preserve a fair franchise process and a competitive marketplace. In turn, you would expect unserved towns like Shutesbury, Leverett, and Wendell to not worry so much about competition and instead offer incentives to Verizon (such as this petition amounts to) to fill in its current telecom infrastructure vacuum.

In fact, we would eagerly support Verizon's petition if we thought there was even a chance this incentive would prompt them to deploy the last generation technology (i.e., DSL) here. And if we are ever given a reason to believe Verizon might provide those upgrades, we would wholeheartedly support such incentives. But given Verizon's track record, and the total lack of responsiveness our substantial efforts have been met with thus far, it would be foolish to consider Verizon's latest claims credible.

Verizon should not get any more advantages until it starts serving its customers. Plain and simple.

Finally, Verizon has had a lot of success lobbying for more favorable franchising terms across the country (seducing consumers, regulators, and politicians with the prospect of triple-play fiber-to-the-premises technology and constructing false grassroots movements like "Consumers for Cable Choice" and "Keep it Local NJ"). And many in the industry expect Verizon to win similar concessions in the near future from the FCC that would pre-empt state laws and uniformly augment Verizon's market influence nationally. Given this backdrop, this petition itself may be less consequential, but forcing Verizon to serve its customers is now more important than ever. Based on the comments that DTE has already received, there is an unambiguous consensus, among small towns and cities alike, that this petition is without merit. It is our hope that DTE will use this opportunity to take a strong stand on behalf of consumers, and in favor of a truly competitive marketplace and a fair franchising procedure.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Aron P. Goldman, Chair
Shutesbury-Leverett Broadband Committee

CC:

1. Lisa Hoag, Chair, Wendell Broadband Committee, Wendell, MA 01379
2. Becky Torres, Chair, Shutesbury Select Board, Town Hall, Shutesbury, MA 01072
3. Fenna Lee Bonsignore, Chair, Leverett Select Board, Leverett Town Hall, Leverett, MA
4. Ted Lewis, Chair, Wendell Select Board, Wendell Town Hall, Wendell, MA 01379
5. Jessica Atwood, Economic Development Planner, Pioneer Valley Connect, Franklin Regional Council of Governments, www.pioneervalleyconnect.org
6. Congressman John Olver, c/o Kristin Wood, 57 Suffolk Street Suite 310 Holyoke, MA 01040, kristin.wood@mail.house.gov, 413-532-7010
7. Rep. Steve Kulik, c/o Bill Tone, The State House, Rm 279, Boston, MA 02133, (413) 772-2727, Tel: (978) 575-0223
8. Sen. Stan Rosenberg, c/o Mary Jane Bacon, 1 Prince Street Northampton, MA 01060, (413) 587-6259, The State House, Boston, MA 02133-1053, (617) 722-1532
9. State Senators Marc Pacheco and Michael Morrissey, c/o Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy